

We need more young people like her, who want to give their lives to the education of our children. And we ought to do whatever is necessary to make sure, number one, they can go to college, get out, and succeed, and number two, when someone like her goes in the classroom, the rest of us do whatever we can to make sure she succeeds in the classroom, as well.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. in Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Raquel Talley, student loan recipient who introduced the President; and NAGB, the National Assessment Governing Board.

### **Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional and Religious Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters**

*October 2, 2000*

#### **Debt Relief for Poor Countries**

**The President.** Just before you all came in, I looked around this table and I said, "I imagine this is the most amazing group of Americans who has gathered together here in this room since Theodore Roosevelt inaugurated it in 1902." And I thank them all for coming. I think it shows you the depth and breadth of commitment of congressional, religious, and civic leaders to convince Congress to appropriate the entire \$435 million that we pledged in debt relief to the world's poorest countries and to authorize the International Monetary Fund to do its share as well.

It's not often we have a chance to do something that economists tell us is the financial imperative and religious leaders say is a moral imperative. It's not often that we find an issue that puts John Kasich and Maxine Waters on the same side, economists and evangelicals in the same room. All of us feel a common obligation to do the right thing.

In the most indebted countries, one in ten children dies before his or her first birthday; one in three is malnourished; the average adult has only 3 years of schooling. This is a terrible omen for our shared future on this planet, and it is wrong.

More than a year ago, religious leaders organized a very successful global campaign for debt relief. It touched many of us here today and generated strong bipartisan support in the Congress. The United States developed a plan with other creditor nations to triple debt relief available to the world's poorest nations, provided they agreed to put the savings from debt payments into health and education. Here are the results so far.

Last year Bolivia saved \$77 million and spent it on health and education. Uganda used its savings to double its primary school enrollment. Honduras now intends to offer every child 9 years of schooling, instead of 6. Mozambique is buying much needed medicines for Government clinics, especially important there in light of the terrible floods they experienced.

Now, other nations are watching to see if the United States will do its part. If we don't, it's possible that some nations will do all the work that we should have done to qualify, or that they needed to do to qualify, but they won't get any relief at all.

Now, let me remind you, we are talking here about one-five-thousandth of our budget to lift the burden of debt around the world for years to come. We're talking about giving as many as 33 nations a chance for a new beginning and about doing good works that our different faiths demand of us. This is a remarkable opportunity that we must seize now, and we must not let other issues divert us from it.

Again, I'm profoundly grateful to all of you for coming and to you, especially, Representative Kasich, for making sure that this is a broad bipartisan group. So I'd like to open the floor to you to say a few words.

*[At this point, Representative John Kasich, Representative Nancy Pelosi, and Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, U.S. Catholic Conference, made brief remarks.]*

**The President.** Thank you. I'd just like to make one more point that I think none of us made, but it's worth making. And again, I want to say this is an amazing group. Rabbi, we thank you for coming. Reverend Robertson and all the Members of Congress. Bono, thanks for coming back from Ireland.

There is another point that should be made here. Some of the people who have not supported us have said, "Well, so many countries have problems of their own making, they've got to solve their own problems." The unique thing about this debt-relief initiative is that the money has to go to meet the human needs of the people. It cannot go to pad the government; it cannot go to pad private pockets; it cannot go to build military arsenals. It can only go to meet long-term human needs.

So that if we can do this, one of the best long-term benefits will be we will be providing a breathtaking incentive for good governance in these countries, which will enable them to do things for their own people that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. So that's another reason that I am profoundly grateful to all of you for this.

Now, we'll take a couple of questions and we've got to—

#### ***Middle East Peace Process***

**Q.** Mr. President, two questions. First, over the weekend, did you personally see the videotape of the 12-year-old Palestinian boy who was shot over the weekend, and have you got a reaction to it? And secondly, sir, what assurances have you received in the last 24 hours from either Prime Minister Barak or Chairman Arafat that they are doing all that they can to bring a cessation to the violence?

**The President.** The answer to your first question is, I did see it.

**Q.** Your reaction, sir?

**The President.** The first time I saw it, I didn't know what the result was, and I kept wondering if there was something else that the father could do to shield the child. I mean, I was literally watching as if it were someone I knew. It was a heartbreaking thing to see a child like that caught in the crossfire.

I've talked to Chairman Arafat. I've talked to Prime Minister Barak. We've had virtually constant contact with them. I am convinced that they must do everything in their power to stop the violence, and I think they are now trying. And we're going to do everything we can. We have—as you know from the statement I put out yesterday, we've offered some ideas, and we've been working on this all day.

So we'll just have to see if we make some more progress tomorrow morning over there. I think it will be better tomorrow. I hope it will.

#### ***Debt Relief for Poor Countries***

**Q.** On the debt relief issue, the holdup seems to be Senators Gramm and McConnell. What can you offer them to get this moving?

**The President.** Well, I don't know what else we can offer them but the evidence. I think if we just keep working at it, we might get there. We have such a good, broad bipartisan group here that I think in the end that we'll be able to work it out with them. And we're certainly working on it.

#### ***Middle East Peace Process***

**Q.** Mr. President, in your talks with the Israelis and Palestinians, do you get the impression that the recent violence is helping them move along towards wanting to reach an agreement? Or is it hurting things?

**The President.** Well, in the short run, it's hurting them, because they can't do anything on the peace process until people stop dying and the violence stops. But when the smoke clears here, it might actually be a spur to both sides as a sober reminder to what the alternative to peace could be. So we have to hope and pray that will be the result.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. M.G. (Pat) Robertson, president, Christian Coalition; musician Bono; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Representative Kasich, Representative Pelosi, and Archbishop McCarrick.

#### **Statement on Energy and Water Development Appropriations Legislation**

*October 2, 2000*

Today Congress passed a deeply flawed energy/water appropriations bill that threatens major environmental harm by blocking our efforts to modernize operations on the